

Globalization Makes You Sick! WHO Warns of Drug-Resistant Bacteria

by Caroline Hartmann

WIESBADEN, Germany, May 16—The World Health Organization (WHO) released an alarming report in April about the increase of drug-resistant pathogens. It documents that cases have been registered in 36 countries, where antibiotics no longer have any effect. The WHO warns that it is only a matter of time before this resistance spreads worldwide, and details how bacteria are withstanding the “massive” attack against them by antibiotics. These include *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, a pathogen that can cause deadly lung infections, especially in hospital patients; the *E. coli* bacterium, which causes common urinary tract infections; and especially, the multiple-resistant bacterium that is being found in hospitals, MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*).

If these widespread pathogens reach the urinary tract, lungs, or open wounds, they can be life-threatening. Although the report also covers drug resistance in the broader sense, as in HIV and malaria therapy, its focus is on antibiotics.

The situation is particularly disastrous in Germany. Scientists working with Matthias Hermann, Medical Director of the Institute for Medical Microbiology and Infection Control at the Saarland University Hospitals, have recently determined the prevalence of patients with MRSA during a four-week period in one of the 24 acute care hospitals in the state of Saarland. Of more than 20,000 patients studied, 436 were carriers of the pathogen, the scientists reported in the journal [Plos One](#).

WHO Assistant Secretary-General Keiji Fukuda, in his introduction to the WHO report, warns of a “post-antibiotic era,” in which common infections and minor



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The Dharavi slum in Mumbai, India, where drug-resistant tuberculosis has broken out. Solving the larger global crisis of poverty and globalization is the prerequisite to dealing with public health problems.

injuries could once again mean a death sentence, and says that, as long as there is no change in the current use of antibiotics, “step by step, we will lose the benefits of these drugs. The consequences will be devastating.”

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) in Berlin, scientists at the Hamburg Academy of Sciences, and the National Academy of Sciences (Leopoldina) in Halle have been warning for years about the increase of antibiotic-resistant germs. The RKI has established a system for monitoring the occurrence and the spread of drug-resistant infectious agents (the system is known as ARS, Antibiotic Resistance Surveillance Germany), as a kind of early warning system for new types of antibiotic resistance. A national reference center was also set up at the Ruhr University in Bochum, where further analyses will be made, for example, of bacteria such as the so-

called gram-negative hospital pathogens. Contrary to the WHO, the RKI came to the conclusion that “further spread of multi-resistant pathogens can be prevented, through targeted measures of hospital hygiene and antibiotic treatment tailored to the drug-resistance in the particular locality.”

The fears expressed in the WHO report are certainly justified; however, some of the WHO’s conclusions are questionable, such as, that use of antibiotics should be limited. Other important causes of the problem are not being addressed at all, such as globalization, food price speculation, the massive expansion of ethanol production—which means the destruction of food production in poor countries—as well as the increase in poverty in the industrialized states, which is not to be underestimated. The continuing outbreak of new or hitherto eliminated viral infections, including polio and measles, is not being sufficiently addressed. And the ebola epidemic in Guinea shows dramatically what is actually lacking, because the leading pharmaceutical companies are not interested in developing a vaccine for this most dangerous and highly contagious disease. Supposedly experts say that “a project like this is not profitable for the companies” (*Rheinische Post*, April 9, 2014).

Research Is at a Standstill

The WHO report ignores a very important and undeniable fact regarding antibiotic use, which is that, along with the beginning of globalization and market liberalization, the emergence of “green” fanaticism, and the decisions not to pursue basic research, e.g., in the nuclear field, an even more obvious decision detrimental to human welfare was made, resulting in the failure to discover any new antibiotic for over 30 years!

Prof. Jörg Hacker, the president of the National Academy of Sciences (Leopoldina), made this point very clearly at the beginning of last year. He is the co-author of an article, “Antibiotics Research: Problems and Prospects,” published in January 2013 by the Acad-

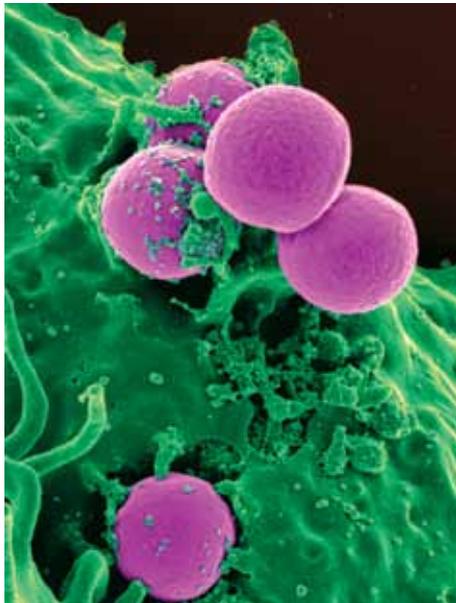
emy of Sciences in Hamburg and Leopoldina, which has eight recommendations for how to prevent the further spread of drug-resistance, including why urgently needed antibiotics have to be developed. In an interview with the daily *Die Welt* in January 2013, he said that the problem could be handled, but that the failure to develop new antibiotics for more than 30 years means that things have been irresponsibly brought to a standstill.

It is useful to recall in this context how the discovery of highly effective antibiotics occurred in the first place. It began with the discovery that a dye could be made from ordinary tar (i.e., carbon), which could successfully treat pestilential diseases such as malaria. In 1882, Robert Koch used a methylene blue dye to identify the tuberculosis pathogen, and it was subsequently recognized that bacteria could be stained. Such toxic dyes could also destroy bacteria without harming the infected individuals. Koch’s collaborator Paul

Ehrlich (not to be confused with the genocidalist Paul R. Ehrlich, today), in 1910, developed salvarsan, a compound that destroys the pathogen that causes syphilis, with only minor side effects for the patient, as well as the serum germanin used against sleeping sickness, and the world-famous aspirin. These are naturally extracted or synthesized substances that man has been using for over 200 years, and that have saved millions of lives. And it is a slap in the face of every patient, when today’s Paul Ehrlich Foundation announces that “every unnecessary antibiotic encourages the development of resistance.”

A half-truth is also a lie!

The bottom line: For the past 30 years, protecting human health has ceased to be a priority. The WHO’s calls for access to clean water and sanitation around the world are absolutely right, but the whole discussion of drug resistance should be considered a warning sign that we must change worldwide economic policy as soon as possible, in the direction of development and the common good. Otherwise, we will permanently lose the ability to combat deadly pathogens and viruses.



A scanning electron micrograph of MRSA bacteria. This pathogen, which is sometimes found in hospitals, is especially virulent.